

Hankins leaves big shoes to fill at church

Two years ago when writing about the Rev. Nathaniel "Hank" Hankins, I recall Ray Harper telling me of a discussion about a prospective new pastor for First United Methodist Church, and the difficulty that a new pastor would face following beloved longtime pastor Carl Rohlfs.

Ray said he'd never forget hearing someone say, "He has big shoes to fill," and the comment that followed from Hank exclaiming, "Oh, no he doesn't. He's a child of God. He will bring his own shoes."

Well, the time has come that the beloved associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in San Angelo for the past 10 years, who had the wisdom to state that "each person professing to be a child of God will indeed weave his own way," has hung up his own "big shoes" and official duties for First Church.

Saturday evening, in front of a packed house in the FUMC Celebration Hall, many dear friends came to say, "Thank you, Hank." Rohlfs, who now heads the United Methodist Conference Southwest Texas; Michael Bell, of Wesley United Methodist; Bishop Michael Pfeifer



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er and many others from near and far came to wish Hank well in his retirement.

Hank has been a source that I have tapped many times in my 10 years of writing, and I've called on him when I have had concerns about something that I deemed important because I value his perspective and respect his counsel.

The song "Sweet, Sweet Spirit, Sweet Heavenly Dove" reminds me of Hank, because he has such a sweet, sweet spirit.

Lisa Lesosky, of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, concurs. She said he is a favorite for preaching funerals, including her father's. "Hank's retiring is going to be a big loss for us," she said. "It will be very difficult to replace him." She described Hank as "anointed."

Pfeifer said he and Hank had worked together on many projects, including the Race Task Force and

the recent Peace Ambassadors.

"The name Nathaniel, Hank's formal name, has such significance," Pfeifer said. "Nathaniel was one of the 12 apostles of Jesus. Every year in the Catholic Church, we celebrate each apostle with a day. And when we celebrate Nathaniel's day, I always send him a card and remind him that it is his 'saint's day.'"

"I remind him that Jesus looked at Nathaniel and said, 'This is a man without guile,' a man who is sincere, a man who is truthful, and not deceptive, and it is that which reminds me of Hank Hankins."

Pfeifer thought back to when Hank was on the City Council in the early 1990s and he recalled that then-Mayor Dick Funk told him he often wished he had several council members like Hank.

"He always wanted to do what's right," Funk said in a 1998 newspaper article. "It really didn't make any difference who was making the argument, Hank tried to figure out what the right thing to do was."

First Church member Bubba Harrison said Hank will be missed. "You know, the thing that sets Hank

apart from most people is that he listens," Harrison said.

"He is one of the most sought after counselors in town for that reason. He has gone through four terms of preachers at First Church because of his ability and willingness to listen. Hank was the guy that steadied the ship through each pastoral change. He was the man that made it balanced, held everything together so that the church could go forward at all times."

Harrison called Hank "a people builder. He is always encouraging everyone and helping them bring out their best." He went on, "Hank has been a sudden burst of God's goodness to all who know him."

Amen. Hank, we love you. Congratulations on another chapter in your life done well. Ecclesiastes Chapter 3: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

Hank can be heard one last time at 8:30 and 10:45 a.m. today at First United Methodist.

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